97-84012-28

Harrison, Frederic

A New Year's address to the positivists of...

[London]

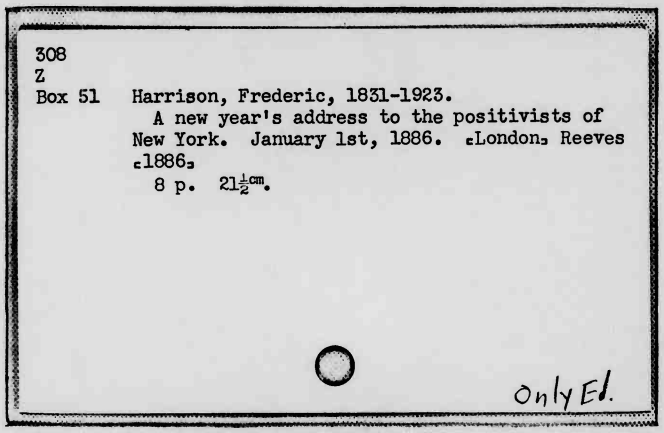
[1886?]

97-84012-28
MASTER NEGATIVE #

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
PRESERVATION DIVISION

BIBLIOGRAPHIC MICROFORM TARGET

ORIGINAL MATERIAL AS FILMED - EXISTING BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD


308
Z
Box 51 Harrison, Frederic, 1831-1923.
A new year's address to the positivists of New York. January 1st, 1886. [London, Reeves [1886]
8 p. 21½cm.
Only Ed.

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: *Reproductions may not be made without permission from Columbia University Libraries.*

TECHNICAL MICROFORM DATA

FILM SIZE: 35mm REDUCTION RATIO: 10:1 IMAGE PLACEMENT: IA (IIA) IB IIB

DATE FILMED: 2-4-97 INITIALS: PB

TRACKING # : 21176

FILMED BY PRESERVATION RESOURCES, BETHLEHEM, PA.

K1500 Dup
Bo

A NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS

TO THE

POSITIVISTS OF NEW YORK.

308
2
H451

BY

FREDERIC HARRISON.

January 1st, 1886.

REEVES AND TURNER, 196, STRAND.

A NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS.

I.

It was with no small pleasure that the Positivist Society of London heard of the intention of their Positivist brothers in New York to meet at the opening of a new year, that they might commemorate the onward march of Humanity, confirm their hopes and their belief, and kindle anew the sense of sympathy and brotherhood. A faith in the power and destinies of our common humanity would be a truly ridiculous affectation if it were consciously confined to one corner of the civilised world, or to one country, or race, or class of men. It is not so with us. The living spirit of Humanity kindles in all to whom it comes a natural and instinctive feeling of our human brotherhood, in the glow of which all kinds of divisions, limitations, exclusions, antipathies fade away. Humanity creates a brotherhood purer, deeper, and stronger than ever was yet dreamed in any religion, in any patriotism, in any community. For, alone of all the harmonising forces, Humanity repudiates all kinds of exclusion: of race, of country, of class, of sect. The theologies, and Christendoms, and Godhoods of old time have taught men many good things, and have inspired many noble deeds; so, too, have patriotism and Socialism, and many another form of generous fraternity and equality. But they have all taught men as well to hate and attack all those who refused to stand within their fold. Christians burn with hostility to the Infidel; Deists despise the heathen; patriots curse the enemies of their country; Socialists preach the extermination of the rich; and the brotherhood of man in the mouths of Anarchists too often means the slaughter of their own fathers' sons. Even the republic, that name of the active commonwealth sacred in the eyes of all Positivists, after Humanity itself, too often requires a rooted hostility to other types of society. Humanity alone is able to embrace all human good or force, to unite all men, and to fuse all classes, all sects, and all peoples. Humanity is far more than the brotherhood of man, for it reminds us of all the

human races in the past as well as in the future. It is coextensive with the planet itself, and coeval with civilisation in the sum.

Hence it is a comfort and an inspiration to all of us who seek to renew our lives by the light of trust in Humanity to feel that in so many countries and cities there are gatherings of men and women, meeting on the same day, with so many languages, and with past history so different, but all converging to one idea, and filled by the same hopes. In London we meet at several places; in Manchester, in Liverpool, in Birmingham, in Newcastle-on-Tyne, in Leicester, and in many other spots; so, too, in France—in Paris, in Havre, in Rouen, in Bordeaux, in Lyons, in Marseilles; in Holland; also in Denmark, in Sweden, in Hungary. So, too, in Russia our devoted friend, Mr. Frey, is carrying on his courageous teaching. Across the Atlantic, in the Eastern and in the far Western states and territories, and in Canada, the same spirit is at work; and in sundry places in India and in Japan.

We meet to fill our minds with the immensity of Humanity amongst living men, and also with the permanence of Humanity, since the days of the rude men—men who lived in caves and fought bears and mammoths; and with the boundless future of Humanity, when all these miserable distinctions of church, sect, class, nationality, association, and party shall be enlarged into the supreme brotherhood of Humanity; when the colour of the skin, or the function in the public work of industry, or the dross of gold or landwealth, or the language spoken, or the area of our city or state, or the faith that we acknowledge, shall no longer separate man from man, but all men shall be equally children of our mother Humanity, and classed only by the value of their service given to Humanity.

II.

In the accounts we have received in London of the formation of the Positivist group in New York, nothing has given us greater satisfaction than to see that it is entirely spontaneous, free, and self-formed. In our eyes, all healthy Positivism is essentially spontaneous and free. It is the only really spontaneous religion now extant. It is not, and cannot be, a faith or superstitious dogma imposed by authority from without, and accepted or submitted to in blind trust that good will come out of obedient discipleship. All modern religions are so taught and propagated. And most modern systems of political or social regeneration are imposed from without by eager and powerful natures acting on weaker ones, in blind trust,

or with, at best, belief in a doctrine that is very simple and easily grasped, right or wrong.

Positivism, by its nature, is nothing of the kind. It means the acceptance, upon conviction, of positive truths, all, at any time, capable of demonstration. "Positivism" is a French word meaning the "habit of trusting to what has been and can be *proved*." Positivism, to translate it freely, means "the scientific faith; the habit of resting our lives and our beliefs on solid, provable certainties that we can understand and teach to others." Hence it excludes all *blind* trust in authority, and all cut and dried formulas. No man can be a real Positivist unless he is convinced of certain scientific truths; and as these truths are numerous and lie in many different spheres, partly intellectual, partly moral, partly practical, and belong to philosophy, to politics, and to personal duty and conduct, no man can be a convinced Positivist all of a sudden by such an inspiration or emotion as what is called "conversion" in religious communities, and sometimes in Socialist communities. Positivism does not jump down a man's throat or flash into his brain in a minute. It is a habit of mind, a frame of heart, a type of character, slowly formed by reflection, practice, and experience. The Christian missionary is fond of converting a whole meeting in a sermon or two. The converted believer cries out (often in a state of mere excitement): "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!" and he would find it very difficult to put in rational words what he believed, or what he ought to do in consequence of his belief. The whole thing is a rather hysterical spasm, and thus it is that after a few loud sermons and some louder and noisier hymns, and often drums, whole crowds of people—good, bad, and indifferent—are said to be converted in a week. Some of the political and Socialist propagandists act in a similarly spasmodic way. Now, Positivism, being in its terms "scientific conviction," the practical purpose of living a definite life to a given end, does not seek to convert in this way. Conviction must ripen slowly, and character, to be efficient, must be formed by effort and practice. And a humane heart and spirit must come by a long habit of humane sympathy in act, word, and thought. A true Positivist would rather say: "Humanity I believe, after examination, and what I do not understand I do not believe; but I will try to understand by further inquiry, and in the meantime I will try to act up to what I do understand." That seems to me more the keynote of a Positivist prayer, meaning by prayer "the inward resolution to act outwardly up to our highest ideal of right."

We never seek to hasten a Positivist conviction. It would not be

conviction if we did. Most of our most zealous brothers have deliberately occupied themselves for years in reflection and in satisfying their minds. Nor do we care if we only number here and there a few hundreds. Those few hundreds, if they have conviction and energy, will impress their belief on others by thousands and thousands. We are not in a hurry, and wish to avoid all pressure on others. We do not seek to disturb any man's sincere religious belief if he is comfortable in it, and it enables him to live a right life. We do not think that those who are not Positivists are going to hell, or are in a bad way, or are not doing their duty to humanity in honest ways as useful citizens. All honest men are servants to humanity, all are children of humanity, and all are promoting the ultimate triumph of humanity, whether they know it or not, and whether they cling to one of the old beliefs or not. After all, the simple spirit of the Gospel is a part of the Religion of Humanity, and so is the systematic spirit of Socialism. Both Evangelicals and Socialists would be better and stronger men, I think, if they gave up the cruder and narrower dogmas that separate them from their fellows, and if they could recognise the larger truths and inspirations of humanity. But, in the mean time, though they cling to a narrower platform, we can recognise the good in them. Positivism, in fact, is the most free, the most sure, the most spontaneous, and most humane form of all belief, because its true, dominant ideas are *scientific certainty* and *humanity as a whole*, and these two ideas exclude all superstition, coercion, dogmatism on the one side, and all sectarianism and sectional prejudice on the other.

III.

But when we speak of conviction and scientific certainty, we assuredly do not mean that Positivism can only admit learned persons, or that it is merely a new kind of philosophy. On the contrary, it is essentially a moral and social regeneration, based on philosophical certainties, and leading to political and practical reforms. But the philosophy is merely in its doctrinal basis, and the political reforms are in its future hopes and ideals. On the one hand, it does not mean that all Positivists must be philosophers, nor that all regeneration must lie in political reforms. The centre and essence of Positivism lies in a human life of sympathy and practical duty—in the spirit of its cardinal precept: "Live for others." "Live for others" is the core of the Religion of Humanity, and every one with a good heart and manly character can act up to

this without being a philosopher, without being learned, or rich, or powerful. The most hardly-worked toiler, the most ignorant, the most unhappy can act up to this, do their duty, and feel happier and nobler by doing it. We, most of us, however hard or lonely be our lot, have homes, family, friends, comrades. We have parents, sisters, brothers, wives, children, companions, fellow-citizens. We can, most of us, help our own family, do our duty in our own homes, improve our own knowledge, bring up our own offspring, influence our own neighbours, animate our fellows, work for a great cause, and feel the nobler for a great ideal by trying to know humanity better, to live more vividly the lives of servants of humanity, and by sustaining our purposes by the hope of humanity. If we do this honestly, unflinchingly, and intelligently, then we are good Positivists, and none can be better.

But although Positivism has a central essential precept, Live for others, and a central dominant ideal, Humanity, it is not to be supposed that this is all, and that it stops there. This is enough for those whose lot is at present so hemmed about by hard necessity that they can get at no more. But it is only enough whilst others are working to get at more, and to make Positivism a reality as a whole. Positivism is not to be reduced, like the Gospel of Christ, or the Sermon on the Mount, to a simple precept such as "Love and fear God, and do unto your neighbour as you would be done by." Positivism in saying, "Live for others," has expanded all this into a set of solid and practical precepts adapted to our life at home, in public, in industry, in education, in politics—showing what we ought to do and why we ought to do it, in our conduct toward our parents, wives and husbands, children, friends, and the public. It has shown what we ought to learn, wherein and how to learn it, how and in what spirit we ought to work, what the State ought to do for us, and what we ought to do for the State. Altogether, it has offered a complete practical sketch of the best type of home, of education, of workshop, of farm, of school, of church, of health, of republic, of club, of government, of senate and representation, of municipality and city. It gives a type of the way in which citizens may live a healthy, moral, industrious, useful, religious, social, and patriotic life. All this is not imposed by authority of any pope, priest, king, or dictator, but a free scheme of life to be accepted on conviction, resting on evidence, argument, and proof. No man is asked to adopt it, unless or until it satisfies his reason and his sympathies. Nor is it contended, nor do we contend in Newton Hall, that all this mass of educational, social, political, and

moral precept has to be formally acknowledged as binding before any man can be reckoned a real Positivist. That is not how we read Auguste Comte, or teach his reading to others. We say, Here are the types of life he recommends, and here are the reasons on which he recommends them. You can adopt them as far as you are honestly persuaded, or can follow his reasoning. If that reasoning does not convince you, do not pretend that it does. But the scheme holds together all of a piece, so that you cannot pick out here and there bits that you like; for it all rests on a mass of ideas in history, science, and philosophy to which you probably never gave a thought in your life. Wait, ponder, inquire, and compare—mindful always that a regeneration of human life and thought was not designed by Auguste Comte exactly according to the point of view of American citizens in the year 1886; that there were tens of thousands of years of human life before 1886, and millions and millions of keen, earnest, brave souls who lived neither in America nor in Europe.

We do not ask a convinced Positivist to accept all that may be found in the mass of Comte's writings. That we think would be treason against Positivism and scientific proof. It will be enough if a convinced Positivist intelligently accepts the great Positivist precepts, with all that they imply. In the moral and essential sphere, "Live for others," live in active employment of your social faculties and instincts. In the intellectual world, rest in "Order and progress"—that is, rest in demonstrative knowledge and in view of human improvement. In the political and social sphere, "Live without concealment"—*i.e.*, make your life a pattern to your neighbour, and seek to guide him through his reason, and never to effect a good end by secrecy, fraud, or conspiracy.

In behalf of our London Society of Newton Hall, I offer you a brotherly welcome in your young movement, and wish you a good work of it in the name of Humanity.

FREDERIC HARRISON,
President Positivist Com. of London.

W. Speaight & Sons, Printers, Fetter Lane, London.

MSH 21176

END OF
TITLE